

Wisdom of Dreams

MoMA retrospective salutes local lesbian auteur

BY IOANNIS MOOKAS

Thirty years ago Su Friedrich moved to New York, and for nearly as long, she has been patiently creating a body of subversively autobiographical, formally daring films. Usually filed under lesbian, feminist, or experimental cinema, her work surpasses category. MoMA's mid-career retrospective, like a cherry on their two-scoop queer series this summer, is a welcome chance to catch up with Friedrich's recent video works and marvel again at her classics.

The city into which Friedrich emerged in 1978 with her first Super-8 short "Hot Water" sure was a different place. Beguiling urban views punctuate her early work, one of their incidental charms: the vanished Orchard Street souk in "Cool Hands, Warm Heart" (1979), weathered, cheek-by-jowl sidewalk merchants selling essential goods at humane prices; overhead angles of working girls on the stroll along the Sara Delano Roosevelt park



Screening as part of her MoMA retrospective, "Sink or Swim" (1990) consists of twenty-six poetically condensed, intermittently harrowing chapters from filmmaker Su Friedrich's life with her dad, organized around an inverted alphabetical schema.

in "But No One" (1982), shot from the roof of Friedrich's old building on Forsyth Street.

In 1984 Friedrich made a quantum breakthrough with the feature-length "The Ties That Bind," probing historical

memory and lineal responsibility through a portrait of the artist's mother Lore Bucher, whose childhood in Ulm, Germany, was shadowed by Hitler's rise. Emulsion-scratched questions alternate with Lore's

account heard in voiceover while we observe her in asynchronous black-and-white footage.

As a young woman Bucher met and was brought to the U.S. by the Yankee soldier

THE PERSONAL FILMS OF SU FRIEDRICH

Museum of Modern Art

11 W. 53rd St.

Through Sep. 30

\$19; 212-708-9400 or moma.org/film

Paul Friedrich, who would later achieve renown as a linguist, divorce her in 1965, and become the subject of his daughter's film "Sink or Swim" (1990). The coruscating sensual beauty of "Sink or Swim" manifests in shifting counterpoint with its nerve-stripping honesty. Twenty-six poetically condensed, intermittently harrowing chapters from Friedrich's life with dad are organized around an inverted alphabetical schema, from Zygote to the mythic Athena, Atalanta, and Aphrodite.

"The Ties That Bind" and "Sink or Swim" were prefigured in part by the current in 1970s documentary and feminist filmmaking that trained the camera on filmmakers' own

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